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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001050

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TAGS: [NI](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA SOUTHERN GOVERNORS MUSE ABOUT NATIONAL POLITICS

Classified By: Classified by CG Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: In separate meetings, Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu and Anambra Governor Chris Ngige downplayed the lasting import of the on-going National Political Reform Conference (NPRC), sponsored by President Obasanjo. Neither being allies of the President Obasanjo they both took thorough delight in the firestorm erupting at the conference over resource control and in seeing Obasanjo scramble in an attempt to keep the conference from combusting. Governor Tinubu stated presidential aspirants Buhari, Abubakar (Atiku), and Babangida (IBB), have all approached him about being their running mate in 2007. Meanwhile, for the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) national establishment, Governor Ngige remains the houseguest who simply will not leave. Despite having been kicked out of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) earlier this year, not only has Ngige remained in office, but he has invited himself to all official PDP functions. Ngige said he was biding time. Either the PDP will crack due to the Obasanjo-Atiku feud or Atiku will recapture control of the party during its 2006 convention. Either way, Ngige has cast his lot with Atiku, as a rapprochement with Obasanjo appears chimerical. End Summary.

NPRC - Egg on Obasanjo's Face?

2. (C) In a June 16 meeting with the Consul General to primarily discuss measures to improve the U.S. Consulate's security posture, Governor Tinubu expectorated at the NPRC convoked by President Obasanjo. Tinubu steamed that President Obasanjo's plan A of extending his tenure had apparently crashed at the conference due to lack of support. Plan B of banning key rivals, Buhari and Babangida, also had not garnered sufficient support. In trying too blatantly, Obasanjo had spurred his opponents to ally against his interests.

3. (C) Tinubu speculated Obasanjo was now left with Plan C -- to select a surrogate to run for president. Tinubu claimed that Obasanjo provided a glimpse into his latest thinking during World Bank President Wolfowitz's recent Nigerian visit. At that time, Obasanjo intimated that he would not run but was confident his reforms would perpetuate because pro-Obasanjo reformists like Minister of the Federal Territory Nasser El Rufai, Finance Minister Iweala, and budget maven Oby Esekwesili will remain in place after 2007. The only way Obasanjo can guarantee the offices of this trio beyond 2007 is if he controls the presidency after 2007. And the only way to assure such control is through the victory of a hand-picked successor, Tinubu postulated.

4. (C) In a June 23 meeting with the CG, Anambra Governor Chris Ngige discounted the significance of the NPRC. He questioned how decisions of this advisory body could be made legal and binding, particularly given the enmity between the National Assembly and the NPRC. Ngige could not restrain his laughter at seeing Obasanjo bound into the political bog of the conference - resource control. He hoped Obasanjo plays the issue so lamely as to embitter both the South and the North. For his part, Ngige saw the issue of resource control as a very practical one: give me enough money to run my state and I don't care how much any one else gets. Ngige stated he would encourage governors to further bother Obasanjo by insisting any increase in the allocation to the oil producing states be deducted from the federal government's allotment, and not be a mere re-apportionment of funds amongst states.

Tinubu Says He's Being Courted for VP

5. (C) Tinubu mentioned that VP Atiku and ANPP presidential candidate Buhari both are courting him as a running mate. He has been noncommittal, although he favors Atiku, a long-time friend. Buhari's attendance at the June 12 Democracy Day celebrations in Lagos was no coincidence, Tinubu claimed. In addition to meeting the governor, Buhari met Yoruba elders, according to Tinubu. Tinubu characterized

these meetings as part of Buhari's support-building process.

16. (C) Current VP Atiku wants to keep Tinubu close at hand; the two friends continue to muse about forming a new party together. However, Tinubu said he was aware the VP's interest in gaining the PDP presidential nomination trumps their considerations for now. If Obasanjo somehow reconciled himself to Atiku's presidential candidacy, a trade-off might be Atiku selecting an Obasanjo favorite as running mate. This would not be Tinubu. In such a scenario, Atiku would drop Tinubu without remorse, the governor acknowledged. Conversely, should Obasanjo and Atiku remain estranged and the VP move to separate his wing of the party and form another party, he will need a running mate with substantial support in the south. Tinubu believes he can answer that bill.

17. (C) Lastly, Tinubu said IBB has made overtures. However, Tinubu opined that even sidling toward IBB could turn him into a leper in the South-West given IBB's annulment of the Abiola electoral victory in 1993. Tinubu said most Yorubas would never countenance such an alliance. IBB probably figured this probe was a long shot but ever the schemer he also knew he had little to lose by asking.

Meanwhile in Anambra, Ngige Hangs On and Waits for 2006

18. (C) Ngige told the CG security has improved in Anambra. Ngige said Obasanjo had grown weary of the embarrassment caused by his curious relationship with political heavy Chris Uba and the entire Anambra saga. As a result, Ngige said Uba was feeling much less protected, and now was rarely seen in the state. Ngige claimed Uba spends most of his time in neighboring Enugu state, home of the mercurial governor Nnamani, a political ally of Uba and President Obasanjo. Concerning to his own fortunes, Ngige remains unflappable. The governor continues his quest to be re-instated into the PDP. Ngige said he was equally confident he will prevail in the electoral court case, brought by Peter Obi and the All People's Grand Alliance (APGA).

19. (C) Regarding presidential politics, Ngige told CG while President Obasanjo has wrested control of the PDP national hierarchy, the PDP rank and file and its grassroots organization belong to VP Atiku. Obasanjo has blundered by trying to grab control of the party this early. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to keep glued together these diverse personalities and disparate interests until the 2007 elections. "The president is dancing hard as he can, but the music has not even begun," Ngige guffawed. Ngige predicted Obasanjo's control would unravel by the 2006 convention, when the party would shift decisively in favor of Atiku. If somehow Obasanjo managed to retain control of the party, Atiku would bolt and take with him the bulk of the rank-and-file, Ngige predicted. In that case, the PDP will become a living ghost of itself -- neither completely dead, nor alive but weakened to the point of not being able to hold power.

Comment

110. (C) A Tinubu vice presidency is in the realm of possibility with Atiku or Buhari, but is also unlikely. For Tinubu to become someone's running mate, he will have to play his cards perfectly and yet still rely on Providence to do the remainder. After eight years of Obasanjo, many Nigerians do not want to see a Yoruba as vice-president. Moreover, Tinubu's Alliance for Democracy (AD) party was decimated during the 2003 elections. He cannot be counted on to carry the southwest. However, he does have some attractive points. Lagos is a big prize in presidential elections. If it is not Nigeria's California, it is at least New York or Texas. Also Yorubaland, the Southwest, is half Muslim. Tinubu, a moderate Yoruba Muslim, could attract southern Muslims as well as Yoruba nationalists. For a northern candidate who believes he has the three geo-political zones of his area in hand, Tinubu could be a viable mate. If Buhari is to be the lead man, his ANPP and Tinubu's AD must strike an alliance. If the lead is to be Atiku, the VP would have to leave the PDP and form a party with Tinubu. Yet, there are other southern governors that electorally would make a better match for Atiku. In the end, Tinubu will keep his line out, but neither Buhari nor Atiku will likely take the hook unless other more attractive possibilities fade away.

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